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ABSTRACT

Verbal interactions between adolescents and their parents may affect adolescents' self-esteem and self-concept. The current development of an instrument, the Verbal Interaction Questionnaire (VIQ), was designed to measure adolescents' perceptions of their parents verbal interactions with them. Noting that the relationship between adolescents' perceptions and their parents' perceptions of verbal interactions remains unavailable in the VIQ, the VIQ was modified to assess more thoroughly the familial dynamics of the verbal interaction process. Directions and items on the VIQ were reworded to assess parents' perceptions of their verbal interactions with their adolescent children and to assess parents' perceptions of how they believed their adolescent children perceived their interactions with them. Questions dealing with conflict, anger, depression, and parenting style were added. The modifications of the VIQ should provide counselors with a tool to assist them in better dealing with adolescents experiencing family conflicts. Six references and the questionnaires are included. (AP)

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Assessment of Parental and Adolescent Verbal Interactions

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Abstract

Verbal interactions between adolescents and their parents may affect adolescents' self-esteem and self-concept. Recently, researchers reported the development of an instrument, the Verbal Interaction Questionnaire (VIQ), designed to measure adolescents' perceptions of their parents verbal interactions with them. Although helpful, information about the relationship between adolescents' perceptions and their parents' perceptions of verbal interactions remains unavailable in the VIQ. We, therefore, modified the VIQ to assess more thoroughly the familial dynamics of the verbal interaction process. Directions and items on the VIQ were reworded to assess parents' perceptions of their verbal interactions with their adolescent children and to assess parents' perceptions of how they believed their adolescent children perceived their verbal interactions with them. Also, questions dealing with conflict, anger, depression, and parenting style were added. Our modifications of the VIQ should provide counselors with a tool to assist them in better dealing with adolescents experiencing family conflicts.

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In a previous study, Blake and Slate (1993) studied four types of interactions between adolescents and their primary caregivers: belittling and berating; non-support; non-communication; and rejection and hostility. In their study, they examined adolescents' perceptions of the nature of their interactions with parents, rather than the nature of the actual interactions themselves. That is, Blake and Slate (1993) developed a Likert format questionnaire, the Verbal Interaction Questionnaire (VIQ), in which adolescent participants were asked to respond regarding the frequency with which their parents made certain comments to them. Although Blake and Slate (1993) provide useful information about adolescents' perceptions, their findings are limited in that no information was provided about either the validity of the adolescents' perceptions or about the extent to which the adolescents' perceptions were congruent with their parents' perceptions about the interactions. Information about the validity of adolescents' perceptions is important because evidence exists that indicates adolescents' perceptions of their interactions with their parents tend to change over time (Saarnio, 1994).

Counselors who work with teenagers would find it helpful in their professional practice to examine the relationship between adolescents' perceptions and their parents' perceptions of the same interactions. Moreover, this information about interactions between the adolescent and each parent individually might be beneficial as well. A poignant example that different perceptions may be present between persons about the same interactions is provided by Wallerstein and Blakeslee in Second Chances (1990, p.238). The father told researchers, "My door is always open. My son is welcome to come visit me any time, and I'll give him anything he needs." (This father was barely managing child support. Some of the wealthy fathers contributed nothing for their child's college, but the father's income prevented them from qualifying for financial aid.) The son told researchers, "I'm not welcome in his house. I feel awkward and uncomfortable there. All I do is watch television while he talks to his friends." Wallerstein wrote, "Most commonly, the father thinks he is doing his best while the child feels he or she is starving. The father thinks he is meeting his obligation, the child feels rejected. The father feels he is being neutral and honest, the child thinks he is lying. On the other hand, if the father feels shame, the child feels forgiveness. The net result: Most fathers in our study thought they had done reasonably well in fulfilling their obligations whereas three of four of the children felt rejected by their fathers; they felt that their fathers were present in body but not in spirit." (Of course, much of the time for children of divorce, the fathers were not even present in body. R.A.) "Most fathers would have been very surprised and upset if they had realized the connection between their children's feelings of rejection and the profound consequences." The father is not the only culprit. A mother's remarriage led half the children to feel unwelcome in the new family (p. 239).

Questions also exist about the extent to which findings might differ for children of divorce and children from intact homes. Although the Blake and Slate (1993) preliminary study indicated no significant difference in global verbal interaction patterns as a function of family type (i.e., intact vs. divorced), their study was limited in sample size, geography, and ethnicity. Evidence does exist, however, that divorce may influence the nature of verbal interactions between parents and offspring, as suggested in Second Chances.

Another factor involved in verbal interactions between teenagers and their parents is the nature of the interactions among the parents. That is, what if a child had heard or seen one parent berate or hit the other parent? How do such observations affect the child even if the child is not personally victimized? How long-lasting are such effects? What about actually being a victim? One does not have to have bruises to be a victim. Words can hurt as badly as sticks and stones, and innocent bystanders (children) can suffer. Blake and Slate reported that less than five percent of their sample reported very severe levels of abuse. Various factors, besides the limited scope of

their survey, may account for this low level. Surveys were filled out only by students who returned signed consent forms; this may have weeded out some children because of absence. Also, in a chaotic home, as abusive situations may well be, the form may have been lost or forgotten. An abusive parent might also refuse to give permission; or a shy, fearful child might not ask. Though the Blake and Slate study did not address socioeconomic status, Amato (1992) found that poor whites who lived in rural areas were happier than were poor whites who lived in urban areas. Because this study was limited to rural whites, the low level of severe perceived verbal abuse certainly should not be generalized. Wallerstein said violence is always associated with low self-esteem and intense feelings of rejection (p.117). Though very few of the children in her study had been beaten and all who entered violent relationships had been very young at the time of the divorce, many did have relationship problems resulting in or due to violence (witnessed 10-15 years earlier). This supports Bandura's findings (Shaffer, 1988) which showed that children learn, not only from experience but, from observation.

Modifications

As a result of the limitations of the Blake and Slate (1993) study and their survey, we made numerous modifications of the Verbal Interaction Questionnaire (VIQ) to assess more thoroughly the familial dynamics of the verbal interaction process. Directions and items on the VIQ were reworded in order to: (a) assess parents' perceptions of their own verbal interactions with their adolescent children; and (b) assess parents' perceptions of how they believed their adolescent children perceived their verbal interactions. Also, questions dealing with conflict, anger, depression, and parenting style were added.

Table 1 depicts the original Verbal Interaction Questionnaire described in the Blake and Slate (1993) study. Their questionnaire consisted of 30 items on a three point scale: often, sometimes, and never.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 2 shows the modified questionnaire for use by adolescents. Items A through E involve demographic data such as sex, grade level, age, and ethnicity. Questions 1 through 30 have been taken from the original VIQ with several items reworded. Questions 31 through 48 are new and assess several additional areas. Items 31 through 36 examine how the adolescent has felt (i.e., angry, depressed, happy, lonely) over the past few months. Items 37 through 48 deal with the relationship between teenager and parent in several overall areas including conflict, love, firmness, understanding, and respect. Thus, the modified VIQ addresses issues which may affect the adolescents' perceptions of verbal interactions between them and their primary caretaker.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 3 depicts a modification of the VIQ for use by adolescents in regard to their perceptions of their verbal interactions with their mother. This same assessment, but for fathers, is shown by Table 4. This modification was conducted to investigate more directly the specific nature of the relationship with an adolescent's mother and father. The VIQ shown in Table 1 and the modified one shown in Table 2 did not permit this analysis.

Insert Tables 3 and 4 about here

Next, we modified the VIQ to ascertain parents' perceptions of their interactions with their adolescent offspring. The items are the same as from the modified VIQ. The only change made in this modification was that each item was reworded from the adolescent perspective to that of the parents. Thus, administering the parent and adolescent forms together permits

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investigators to determine the congruence between parents and their teenage offspring regarding the nature of verbal interactions.

Insert Table 5 about here

Finally, we modified the VIQ (Table 6) to ask parents to indicate how they thought their adolescents perceived verbal interactions. Again, items were reworded to reflect adolescents' perceptions of interactions.

Insert Table 6 about here

Discussion

Following the modifications of the VIQ, both parents and teenagers can be surveyed regarding their perceptions of the verbal interaction among themselves. Administered to both adolescents and parents, the VIQ can serve as a springboard for discussion. We believe the expanded VIQ has potential as a useful therapeutic tool in assisting counselors in dealing with adolescents experiencing family conflicts.

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Table 1
Original Verbal Interaction Questionnaire

Statement		Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	My primary caretaker praises me when I do something well.	O	O	O
2.	My primary caretaker yells at me.	O	O	O
3.	I argue with my caretaker.	O	O	O
5.	I talk over my problems with my caretaker.	O	O	O
6.	My caretaker accepts my opinions about things.	O	O	O
8.	My caretaker compliments me.	O	O	O
9.	My caretaker listens to me.	O	O	O
10.	My caretaker uses profanity when he/she is angry with me.	O	O	O
11.	My caretaker has threatened to slap, hit, or beat me.	O	O	O
12.	My caretaker tells other people nice things about me.	O	O	O
18.	My caretaker finds fault with everything I do.	O	O	O
19.	My caretaker tells me he/she loves me.	O	O	O
22.	My caretaker supports my extra-curricular activities.	O	O	O
30.	Whenever I talk to my caretaker about something serious, I feel safe and accepted.	O	O	O

Table 2
Modified Verbal Interaction Questionnaire.

Statement		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	My primary caretaker praises me when I do something well.	A	B	C	D
2.	My primary caretaker yells at me.	A	B	C	D
5.	I talk over my problems with my caretaker.	A	B	C	D
6.	My caretaker accepts my opinions about things.	A	B	C	D
10.	My caretaker uses profanity when s/he is angry with me.	A	B	C	D
25.	My caretaker speaks to me in a warm, caring tone of voice.	A	B	C	D

26.	My caretaker calls attention to my mistakes in front of others.	A	B	C	D
27.	My caretaker tells me s/he wishes I had never been born.	A	B	C	D
28.	My caretaker asks me how I feel about things.	A	B	C	D
29.	My caretaker tells me I am a liar.	A	B	C	D
30.	Whenever I talk to my caretaker about something serious, I feel safe and accepted.	A	B	C	D

For the next set of items, please consider how true each of the following statements is about you and your life in general. Please rate how strongly you agree that each of the statements is appropriate for you and your life, using the following scale:

		Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
31.	I have felt angry over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
32.	I have felt depressed over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
36.	I have felt lonely over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
37.	I have had a lot of conflict with my mother/father over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
39.	My mother/father has shown me a lot of love and affection over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
40.	My mother/father is very accepting of me.	A	B	C	D
42.	My mother/father firmly sets and enforces rules.	A	B	C	D
43.	My mother/father demands that I act in a mature manner.	A	B	C	D
44.	My mother/father thinks that she understands my needs.	A	B	C	D
46.	I feel that I understand my mother/father.	A	B	C	D
48.	My mother/father is a very warm person.	A	B	C	D

Table 3
Modified VIQ to Assess Perceptions Regarding Mother's Verbal Interactions.

About Your Mother

This survey form is focused on your relationship with your mother based on your adolescent years. If you are not currently living with or did not live with your mother during your adolescence, then complete this form as it relates to your father. For persons who are not currently living with their parents or who did not live with their parents during their adolescent years, please respond in terms of your primary caretaker.

Statement		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	My mother praises me when I do something well.	A	B	C	D
2.	My mother yells at me.	A	B	C	D
5.	I talk over my problems with my mother.	A	B	C	D
6.	My mother accepts my opinions about things.	A	B	C	D
10.	My mother uses profanity when she is angry with me.	A	B	C	D
25.	My mother speaks to me in a warm, caring tone of voice.	A	B	C	D
26.	My mother calls attention to my mistakes in front of others.	A	B	C	D
27.	My mother tells me she wishes I had never been born.	A	B	C	D
28.	My mother asks me how I feel about things.	A	B	C	D
29.	My mother tells me I am a liar.	A	B	C	D
30.	Whenever I talk to my mother about something serious, I feel safe and accepted.	A	B	C	D

		Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
31.	I have felt angry over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
32.	I have felt depressed over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
36.	I have felt lonely over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
37.	I have had a lot of conflict with my mother over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
39.	My mother has shown me a lot of love and affection over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
40.	My mother is very accepting of me.	A	B	C	D
42.	My mother firmly sets and enforces rules.	A	B	C	D
43.	My mother demands that I act in a mature manner.	A	B	C	D
44.	My mother thinks that she understands my needs.	A	B	C	D
46.	I feel that I understand my mother.	A	B	C	D
48.	My mother is a very warm person.	A	B	C	D

Table 4
Modified VIQ to Assess Perceptions Regarding Father's Verbal Interactions.
About Your Father

Statement		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	My father praises me when I do something well.	A	B	C	D
2.	My father yells at me.	A	B	C	D
5.	I talk over my problems with my father.	A	B	C	D
6.	My father accepts my opinions about things.	A	B	C	D
10.	My father uses profanity when he is angry with me.	A	B	C	D
25.	My father speaks to me in a warm, caring tone of voice.	A	B	C	D
26.	My father calls attention to my mistakes in front of others.	A	B	C	D
27.	My father tells me he wishes I had never been born.	A	B	C	D
28.	My father asks me how I feel about things.	A	B	C	D
29.	My father tells me I am a liar.	A	B	C	D
30.	Whenever I talk to my father about something serious, I feel safe and accepted.	A	B	C	D

		Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
31.	I have felt angry over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
32.	I have felt depressed over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
36.	I have felt lonely over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
37.	I have had a lot of conflict with my father over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
39.	My father has shown me a lot of love and affection over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
40.	My father is very accepting of me.	A	B	C	D
42.	My father firmly sets and enforces rules.	A	B	C	D
43.	My father demands that I act in a mature manner.	A	B	C	D
44.	My father thinks that she understands my needs.	A	B	C	D
46.	I feel that I understand my father.	A	B	C	D
48.	My father is a very warm person.	A	B	C	D

Table 5
Modified VIQ to Assess Parents' Perceptions of Their Interactions.
By the Parent
This survey form is focused on your relationship with your child based on his/her adolescent years.

	Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	I praise my child when s/he does something well.	A	B	C	D
2.	I yell at my child.	A	B	C	D
5.	My child talks over his/her problems with me.	A	B	C	D
6.	I accept my child's opinions about things.	A	B	C	D
10.	I use profanity when I am angry with my child.	A	B	C	D
25.	I speak to my child in a warm, caring tone of voice.	A	B	C	D
26.	I call attention to my child's mistakes in front of others.	A	B	C	D
27.	I tell my child that I wish s/he had never been born.	A	B	C	D
28.	I ask my child how s/he feels about things.	A	B	C	D
29.	I tell my child s/he is a liar.	A	B	C	D
30.	Whenever my child talks to me about something serious, s/he feels safe and accepted.	A	B	C	D

		Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
31.	My child has felt angry over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
32.	My child has felt depressed over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
36.	My child has felt lonely over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
37.	My child has had a lot of conflict with me over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
39.	I have shown my child a lot of love and affection over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
40.	I am very accepting of my child.	A	B	C	D
42.	I firmly set and enforce rules for my child.	A	B	C	D
43.	I demand that my child act in a mature manner.	A	B	C	D
44.	I think that I understand my child's needs.	A	B	C	D
46.	My child feels that s/he understands me.	A	B	C	D
48.	I am a very warm person.	A	B	C	D

Table 6
Modified VIQ Assessing Parents' Perceptions of Their Adolescent Perceptions of Their Verbal Interactions.

Parent Perceptions of Child

This survey form is focused on your relationship with your adolescent child based on his/her adolescent years. In this survey, we are interested in how you think your adolescent child perceives your interactions with him/her, not in how you perceive your interactions with him/her. That is, we want to know how you think your child perceives your interactions with him/her.

Statement		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	My child thinks that I praise him/her when s/he does something well.	A	B	C	D
2.	My child thinks that I yell at him/her.	A	B	C	D
5.	My child thinks that s/he can talk over his/her problems with me.	A	B	C	D
6.	My child thinks that I accept his/her opinions about things.	A	B	C	D
10.	My child thinks that I use profanity when I am angry with him/her.	A	B	C	D
25.	My child thinks I speak to him/her in a warm, caring tone of voice.	A	B	C	D
26.	My child thinks I call attention to his/her mistakes in front of others.	A	B	C	D
27.	My child thinks I wish that s/he had never been born.	A	B	C	D
29.	My child thinks that I tell him/her that s/he is a liar.	A	B	C	D
30.	Whenever my child talks to me about something serious, my child feels safe and accepted.	A	B	C	D

		Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
31.	My child has felt angry over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
36.	My child has felt lonely over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
37.	My child has had a lot of conflict with me over the last few months.	A	B	C	D
40.	My child feels I am very accepting of him/her.	A	B	C	D
42.	My child thinks I firmly set and enforce rules.	A	B	C	D
43.	My child thinks I demand that s/he act in a mature manner.	A	B	C	D
44.	My child thinks that I understand his/her needs.	A	B	C	D
46.	My child feels that s/he understands me.	A	B	C	D
48.	My child thinks I am a very warm person.	A	B	C	D